

Nature and Causes of Mewati Rebellion

The beginning of the nineteenth century witnessed the emergence of British East India Company as the major political power in India. Consequently, not only was the power of the Mughal Empire broken, but also most of the independent principalities that had come into existence as a result of its disintegration were subjugated by the British. The mighty Marathas Empire, Mysore kingdom and many other Indian principalities were defeated by the British forces. Nevertheless, the crushing defeat of Sindhia of Gwalior at the battle of Laswari by Lord Lake in 1803 was the most significant and had far-reaching political consequence. The defeat of the Sindhia laid to the British protection of the Mughal Emperor and the British control to all over north and central India.

After establishing their rule over India, the British East India Company started its tyrannical rule over the Indian masses in order to fulfill their imperial interests. The British rule affected all the political, social, economic and religious spheres of lives of the Indian people. It created a misunderstanding between the ruler and the ruled. The British oppression and misunderstanding burst into a Rebellion in 1857 at the completion of hundred years British rule after the historic battle of Plassey.

The Rebellion of 1857 has been regarded as a most memorable episode in Indian history. It was in a sense one of the first formidable revolts that had broken out against foreign domination. After suppression of the Rebellion, a series of research works was started by the British as well as Indian intellectuals describing its nature and causes. The problem of how to read the Rebellion of

1857 has been a long-standing one in the historiography of India. The British historiography continuously claimed its mutinous character irrespective of the adverse remarks of Benjamin Disraeli and Karl Marx. The British historians wanted to justify their acts behind the iron curtain of the Whiteman's burden.

The British historiography in advocating the theory of mutiny was only an attempt to save their colonial interest. They used the history or historical figures as the instrumental to save their rule or identity in India. When the British were setting their feet in Indian sub-continent, they called the Mughal Emperor as the sole proprietor of India. They fully utilized the authority of the Emperor for their imperial cause. However, when the same Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar tried re-establishing his power, the British authorities and even historians generally denoted him as the King of Delhi. They tried him for waging war against the ruler and deported him to a foreign land Rangoon.

Sir Syed Ahmad Khan was the first who described about the unrest of the people due to the unfavourable policies of the East India Company. Next most important propagator of popular theory was John William Kaye in 1867; while describing it as mutiny, Kaye settled that the event was an entire people's attempt to overthrow an alien domination. Kaye stated that hurting of religious sentiments, violation of caste rules and the greased cartridges led to the 'mutiny'. Malleon, too while advocating the theory of mutiny, very interestingly put the blame, not on Hindu superstition or Muslim fanaticism, but on the functionaries of the East India Company, who, in trying to preserve their own domination, extending over a hundred years, had completely failed in attaching even one section of the population to British rule.

From the early twentieth century or during the golden jubilee of the Rebellion, the new generation of radical nationalists began to challenge the decrees of colonial historiography and to write their own versions of the past. Vinayak Damodar Savarkar was one of those radical nationalists who advocated the theory of war of independence. Following the ideas of Savarkar, a new thought of nationalist historiography developed with a deep research on the gross-root level. Savarkar while advocating the theory of war

of independence described the annexation of Awadh and the introduction of greased cartridges as accidental causes not as causative factors. There is, of course, a reason for this assumption. This thesis fully grown during Indian National Movement and was one of the sources of inspiration for the nationalists of the first half of the twentieth century.

After the completion of hundred years after the Rebellion in 1957, a new mode of research started in the Indian historiography. In the re-examination of the same question of nature of the Rebellion, the newly independent government of Indian National Congress took a keen interest. Surendranath Sen wrote an official history that concluded, carefully and with admirable restraint, that it was a war of independence that assumed a national scope. Subsequently, the Marxist historians also began to write the history of the Rebellion keeping in view the problems and participation of the common people. S.B. Chaudhuri, Eric Stokes, Rudrangshu Mukherjee, Gautam Bhadra and Tapti Roy gave much stress to the peasants and common people's participation in the Rebellion by raising the subaltern theory.

During the 150th year celebrations of the Rebellion, a new study gained momentum while thorough discussion of different perspectives of the Rebellion of 1857. Apart from the stereotype rake in about the old theory of war of independence, a new thesis of religious nature was given much importance overall. William Dalrymple was the main propagator of this theory. He emphasized the role of the religious class of the Muslim society by highlighting the ideology of the Wahabis and Faraizis. He pronounced that the Rebellion of 1857 was a sort of fundamentalist religious war, a *Jihad*. Irfan Habib also while emphasizing the Marxist views stressed the role of Wahabis and Faraizis. William Dalrymple's religious factor may be considered advancement of great conspiracy theory with slight modifications. It is evident that the writers like Major General Hearsay, Alfred Lyall, and James Outram wrote about Muslim conspiracy by giving the examples of passing of chapattis and the spreading of a different kind of rumour. However, at the beginning of historiography of the Rebellion, the theory of Muslim conspiracy did not get wide

approval. Even the pro-British Sir Syed Ahmed Khan did not consider the revolt as premeditated.

Notwithstanding, at most of the cases, the Indian historians are unanimous in asserting that the Rebellion of 1857 was a popular uprising against the British. However, the role of different communities in the revolt is a matter of debate by historians and intellectuals. In this work, it has been properly emphasized the role of the common Mewati people, especially the peasants and farmers, calling it a popular Rebellion by intelligently evading the controversy. More emphasis has been given to the people of gross root level, who fought against the British due to their personal and collective grievances.

Regarding the popular or common people theory, the intellectuals feel that a Rebellion on such a large scale could not have been planned and carried out with the help of only few groups of people. It needed the active participation of all the people to make it a success. Since the Indian society comprises a large number of lower and backward castes, a Rebellion on such an immense scale could not have been planned and executed without their cooperation. This debate might be fueled by the Mewati history scholars who have started demanding a share in the development pie of the country that had earlier been divided among the elite upper classes by asserting their role in the nation-building process and in the Rebellion of 1857.

The British East India Company began to rule the country after their victory in the battle of Buxar, but most of the regions of north India came under British rule much later in 1803. The British rule of about half a century from 1803 to 1857 produced a great deal of discontent and disaffection among almost every section of the northern India, including Haryana and more especially Mewat. However, unfortunately, the role of Mewatis as a whole has a little mention in the accounts of the Rebellion of 1857.

For the popular uprising, the Mewat region was the most suitable example, where the common people and peasants were the leader as well as the fighter in the absence of the ruling family. It happened for the first time in Indian history when almost all

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the rural as well as urban population of Mewat raised their banner of revolt against the British tyranny and tried their level best to uproot the foreign yoke from their homeland. The Mewati enthusiasm regarding the Rebellion could be gauged that even after the re-conquest of Delhi by the British, the Rebellion continued in Mewat for two months more. After getting the opportunity of the Sepoys revolt, all the Mewatis jumped into Rebellion irrespective of their caste and religion.

The long lasting war waged by the Meo community against the British definitely bears a lot of causes, which deeply affected the lives of the Mewatis from last several decades. Charles Raikes writes that the late disturbances were caused, firstly, by a general mutiny of the Native Army. Secondly, by the violence and rapacity of the Goojar, Mewati, and other clans, disposed in the best times to predatory habits; furthermore by the cruelty of the lower town-mobs and cantonment rabble. Lastly, by the attempts of certain quasi-royal pensioners and landholders to revive their lost local ascendancy.¹

Not only the Raikes, but a lot of historians have stressed the participation of the Mewatis into the Rebellion. As the Mewat region is culturally and geographically different to those of others, some of the most important causes related to Mewat have been discussed under the following headings. These causes would throw much light on the real facts behind the participation of the Meos in the Rebellion.

Heavy Taxation and Miserable Position of Peasantry

Mewat is a hilly region, and most of its soil is alkaline and barren. Even its underground water is salty. Most of the agriculture crops in Mewat area are rain fed. The crops yielded are not sufficient for the livelihood of the population of Mewat. The Mewatis are bound to do more labour for fewer benefits. Perhaps this is one of the reasons that the Mewatis are most hard working, brave and courageous. The alkaline and barren lands of Mewat yielded very low crops of both Rabi and Kharif. Some of its areas were useless as there were full of water accumulated for the whole year.

Some British officers had also explained the miserable position of Mewati peasantry by quoting the position of several lakes in Mewat. About the Khalilpur Jhil, Mr. Maconachine, the Deputy Commissioner, Gurgaon, writes in 1898, "During the ordinary season the whole of this is flooded.....Its area may be reckoned at about 1500 acres." About the Chandeni Jhil, he says, "Here is another permanent swamp..... The permanent basin is perhaps somewhat smaller, say about 1000 acres." The Sangel-Ujina Jhil spreads over a larger area than it covered at Khalilpur or Chandeni. The Kotila Jhil is the largest in the district covering three miles long and two and half miles broad.²

In the medieval times, the Meos found it difficult to pay the land revenue, in any circumstances, which was imposed by the Delhi Government. So the differences and skirmishes started from the Delhi Sultanate continued until the end of the Mughal suzerainty. After the downfall of the Mughal Empire, the Mewat area came under the influence of the Jaipur kingdom. However, the two principalities, Alwar and Bharatpur, emerged out of the eastern territory of Jaipur. Accordingly, the western area of Mewat was divided into Alwar and Bharatpur. Some of its area also came under the Marathas and the European officers like Begum Samru and George Thomas, who obtained the grants over there. After battle of Laswari in 1803, Daulat Rao Sindhia, the Maharaja of Gwalior, was ousted by the British from the Mewat region. Consequently, a vast tract of land of Mewat fell into the hands of the British.³

Following the defeat of the Marathas under Sindhia, most of the areas of north-west came directly under the rule of the British Government. However, the Mewat region under the principalities of Bharatpur and Alwar remained the same. Out of the conquered territories, Sohna, Nuh and Tauru were taken under the direct administration of the British Government, and the administration established in Delhi territory was implemented in these areas. In 1806, Firozpur Jhirka and Punhana were given to the British ally Ahmad Baksh Khan as Jagir, until 1836; Hathin was assigned to Faizullah Beg, the brother of Ahmad Baksh Khan; Hodal was given to Murtaza Khan, and Palwal was assigned to Mohammad Ali

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Khan Afridi. Some of the European officers like Sombre and George Thomas were also given Jagirs. Pataudi, an adjoining area of Mewat was assigned to Faiz Talab Khan.⁴

The Mewat region was summarily settled in 1809, and heavy taxation was imposed. The new British government was more concerned with the collection of revenues in time, which were fixed at high rates. Growing burden of taxation, eviction from land led to the impoverishment of a large section of the peasantry. The revenue collectors were least concerned about the paying capacity of the cultivators and forcefully collected the taxes. In meeting the increasing demand of taxes, the peasants were compelled to sell their lands, or they were caught in the trap of moneylenders. Justice could not be expected from the local administration because it was under the influence of the rich. Thus, under the British rule, the nexus of the official, the landlord and the money lender combined together to exploit the peasantry.

In 1809, Seton assisted by Charles Metcalfe made the first effort to establish regular administration in Mewat region. At first, settlements were made for short periods, but by 1820, conditions became stable enough to make settlements from three to twenty years. The land policy pertaining to the settlements ruined the peasantry of Mewat. They were not implemented with the consent of the people. On the other hand, when the settlements were made, the headmen were imprisoned until they agreed to the terms offered and having accepted them, and furnished security for payment. The poor farmers could not pay the revenue which their village headmen had agreed to pay under compulsion. They had to visit jails several times in this connection. The mode of collection of land tax was extortionate as the assessment was oppressive. The collections were made in February and September, long before the harvest.⁵

The harsh and unsympathetic policy of heavy revenue greatly demoralized the people and shattered the peasant's economy. Not only the peasantry, but the jagirdars were also suffered a lot due to the British policy. It moreover must not be forgotten that much before the time of the Rebellion almost all the Jagirs of Mewat region assigned after 1803 were confiscated and settled according

to the British revenue policy. The heavy taxation and miserable position of the Mewatis forced them to take active part in the uprising and uproot the British paramountcy.

Sir Syed Ahmad Khan opines about the system of land revenue settlement by the British Government that, "The assessment imposed by the English Government have been fixed without any regard to their various contingencies. Land lying fallow pays in the same proportion as other land. Such lands as are for a time left uncultivated in order that they may acquire strength are not considered free from assessment.... The cultivators were obliged to borrow money in order to pay the revenue. The interests on these loans ran up." Sir Syed quotes the statement of Thomason, a Settlement Officer that the settlements under the regulation 9 of 1833 were light on good villages, but pressed heavy on poorer ones.⁶

However, the taxation was burdensome as the agricultural production in Mewat area was very low in comparison to the other adjoining areas. F. C. Channing, the Land Settlement Officer of Gurgaon district (later the collector of Gurgaon district), gives the details that wheat occupied only 5 per cent of the crop area and cotton, which is grown chiefly in the Firozpur tahsil, 8 per cent. There was hardly any sugar cane, very little indigo or vegetables, and no maize. Oil or seedy which in late years had been a very paying crop, were grown to a very small extent. The autumn crop, chiefly consisting of millets and pulse, which were generally retained for home consumption, occupied in this district double the area of the more marketable spring crops. Among the millets, bajra, except in the east, generally prevailed over jowar, which requires a better soil. Even on well lands barley, and not wheat, was the common crop. Wheat had the preference only on naturally irrigated (dahri) lands.⁷

In Mewat region, the British Government fixed the revenue beyond the paying capacity of the peasantry. Most of the areas of Mewat, such as Nuh, Sohna, Palwal, Tauru, Rewari, Firozpur, etc. affected badly and the conditions of Mewati peasantry became miserable. The peasants were bound to sell their cattle and stock in order to pay the revenue. Channing himself describes that the Summary Settlements in Gurgaon, like those of most parts of the

old Delhi territory, were not favorable examples of fiscal arrangements. The assessments were generally based on the excessive demands of the former Native Rulers and Jagirdars. In Rewari, it was said that the villages were settled by Mr. W. Fraser with the highest bidders. The same officer's assessments in Bahora completely broke down; the parganas of Nuh and Sohna greatly deteriorated; Tauru was equally unfortunate. Repeated reductions became necessary, but were often followed by further enhancements and renewed failures. The policy of moderation in revenue matters was but slowly learnt. Palwal was very heavily assessed in 1820, and in Firozpur as late as 1836 the Nawab's high demand was maintained.⁸

The British Government realized the folly much later when the severe famine clutched the area of Mewat. During the famine, in 1837 a Regular Settlement of the Gurgaon district was commenced under Regulation IX of 1833, and in that and the following year almost the whole of the district came under settlement. In Tauru, considerable relief was given; but the assessments of Mr. Lawrence in Palwal and of Mr. M. Gubbins in Firozpur were still decidedly high. Unfortunately, the introduction of the new assessment was accompanied by a severe famine which continued its starvation and suffering until 1841. This was the hard time for the Meos because, on the one hand, they were suffering from the heavy taxation of the British Government and a severe famine at the same time on the other. By this Regular Settlement, the land revenues were reduced only in some areas of Mewat.⁹

However, these reductions of revenue rates in Mewat were still burdensome. British Government further decided to revise the rates of the land revenue. In 1841, Mr. M. Gubbins revised his own assessment of Firozpur, and Punhana made three years before, reducing it by about 20 per cent, for the term of settlement, and remitting all outstanding balances. About the same time Mr. Barnes revised the assessment of parganas Palwal and Tauru made by Mr. Lawrence in 1837 and 1838, granting here also reductions of about 20 per cent. Mr. Barnes also assessed the Nuh tahsil at similar rates. The Rewari and Gurgaon tahsils had not suffered so much from the bad seasons as had the south-east of the district,

and Mr. Lawrence's original assessments of those tahsils were allowed to stand.¹⁰

The rate of land revenue in Mewat was different in accordance with the type of land, fertility, and means of irrigation. The rate of revenue on the land irrigated by well was from Rs. 3.80 to Rs. 4.00 per acre. However, where there was no means of irrigation except rainy water, the rate of revenue was Rs. 2.80 per acre for *Narmot* (good loam) lands.¹¹

F.C. Channing remarks about the heavy taxation policy of the British Government, "1842, as also in previous years, it would appear as if successive calamities were caused by high assessments and cured by their reduction. I believe this inference to be incorrect. The assessments of 1842 and previous years were higher than any we now make, prices were lower, and our collection proceedings were rigid; but what broke the agriculturists down was a succession of bad years (famine years), and what restored their prosperity, equally in those days and on the last and most recent occasion, was the reoccurrence of good years (end of the famine years). I earnestly hope that this will be remembered when trouble next comes."¹²

These reduced rates of revenue by Regular Settlement were also much high which comprehensively beyond the paying capacity of the Mewati farmers. In order to pay these revenues they usually fell in the clutches of the *Mahajans* and other moneylenders. The British torture regarding revenue collection was surplus on the Meos. The conditions of the Mewati peasantry were very miserable. Due to their misery and suffering, some of them were bound to theft or even beg. K. C. Yadav quotes an incident that one Mewati was caught for stealing one and half *Seer* paddy (unprocessed rice) and produced in the court of Mr. Metcalfe. Metcalfe sentenced him life imprisonment for that petty crime.¹³

Government did not care the Meos' sufferings, and no relief operations were noted during the whole period of famine in Mewat. More ridiculously government blamed the Mewati population for their suffering from the natural curse famine.

According to F.C. Channing, "The Meos are an unsatisfactory class of peasantry. They are reckless in prosperity and helpless when in trouble, but their behaviour during recent times of distress has not confirmed the opinion that they readily relapse into predatory habits. The standard of living in the case of this class is certainly low."¹⁴

In his *Settlement Report* in 1882-83, Channing showed his satisfaction by criticizing the pre-Rebellion land revenue settlements of Mewat area in the Gurgaon districts. He says, "It is undeniable that the condition of the agriculturist in many respect enormously improved as compared with the state of affairs which prevailed before 1860. Produce sells now at a much higher value; there are greatly improved qualities of export, and it is therefore easier to sell, and it is probable that even the inferior grains and pulses can be and are sold in the market to a very much larger extent than was the case formerly. Moreover fluctuations of prices are now less severe and sudden than was the case 40 years ago."¹⁵

No serious attempts were made to improve the conditions of the people and their related land. This added more filth in the ongoing miseries in Mewat. This disgusting situation was also in many parts of India. Engels, the friend of Karl Marx writes in a letter to him that British Government in India has completely avoided the agriculture that's why it is damaging and destroying.¹⁶

All the peasants of Mewat, including the Meos, Jats and Ahirs heavily taxed by the British Government had no substitute but to mortgage and ultimately sell their lands to the moneylenders. In Mewat, even the high-class land owners were reduced into the position of tenants. They were in great distress and perhaps waiting for the opportunities to overthrow the tyrant British rule. The Mutiny at Meerut, and the Sepoys move towards Delhi, provided them the long-awaited opportunity to end the British rule from their homeland.

Imperial Gazetteer of India also reports about the same situation of the Mewat region. Although, the data provided by the Gazetteer is of the much later period of 1879 but more or less the situation was the same during the Rebellion of 1857. The Gazetteer says,

"During the past fifteen months about five per cent, of the cultivated area of the two Meo tahsils of Nuh and Ferozpur has been mortgaged, and now 17 per cent, of the total cultivated area is so burdened that there is little hope of its ever being redeemed. The Meo landowners are rapidly becoming practically reduced to the position of tenants. Their condition loudly calls for special consideration, though it is difficult to see what can be done for them. A large amount of revenue due from them has been suspended, but they have had to borrow for food, and the evil has only been reduced, not removed."¹⁷

After the termination of the Rebellion, Mewat region was very liberally settled. Channing reports that in the year of drougthy 1860-61, special leniency was shown in the collection of the revenue, and liberal relief was given by Government, by which means serious distress was averted.¹⁸ Most probably the leniency by the British Government was not because of the drougth but due to the fear of defection by the local population who played most important role in the Rebellion of 1857.

In the Bharatpur princely state, the Meo population was inhabited the tehsils of Nagar, Gopalgarh, Kaman and Deeg. Nagar and Gopalgarh were most sensitive due to the periodic rebellions of the Meos as they were suffering the heavy taxation policy of the state. In 1844, about ten thousand agriculturist Meos surrounded the Diwan and his group of Bharatpur state, who were rescued only after the intervention of the Darbar Regiment. In 1853, when the Naib Diwan came to collect revenue at Saimla in Nagar, he was shot at, and two of his party including a Goojar Risaldar, were killed. The Diwan brought a strong force of Cavalry and Artillery to chastise the rebellious Meos but they had meanwhile fled to the neighbouring state Alwar.¹⁹

Subsequently to the Nagar and Gopalgarh incident, the Meos' unrest was again bursted at Sikri and Bharatpur in 1854 and 1855. The British Officers Lawrence and O'Dwyer, in their reports severely blamed the Diwan, the Princely State and the native land revenue and administration. In view of the popular resentment, the demand was reduced by 19.8% in the summary settlement of 1855-56 to 1857-88. That's why the Rebellion in Bharatpur State

could not gain much momentum. After the termination of the Rebellion, the Bharatpur State once again raised the revenue by 12.5 % in the three-year settlement of 1859-62.²⁰

The Mewati area in Alwar State was troublesome, but the Maharaja had not imposed heavy taxation policy during the Rebellion. However, after the suppression of the Rebellion in 1858, the revenue was raised 5% by the Settlement Officer Captain Impey for three years. In 1861, the revenue was again raised by 20% by the same officer for further ten years.²¹

The land revenue policy of the British Government caused much damage when the natural disasters also followed in the same years. *Imperial Gazetteer of India* reports that due to the regular famines in the years of 1833 and 1837, many villages of Mewat region lost their entire population through death and emigration.²² As a result of the Regular Settlement of 1837-38 in Mewat and subsequently famine in 1837-39 in the entire area of Mewat, left no choice for the Mewatis except loot and plunder.²³ The Mewati people made the British Government and its tyrant policies responsible for all their distress and disaster. They find it fair opportunity to overthrow the British power during the rebellion of 1857.

The unrest of the peasantry could be felt that the time when the revolutionaries attacked Gurgaon, they completely burnt the land revenue records of the tahsils and district headquarter. They did the same wherever they could find especially in the Government offices. They wanted to remove the records of the debts, land transfer and land and revenue-related court cases. Not only the Government records, but they burnt the records of the mahajans and other moneylenders. After the termination of the war, a new agrarian policy was introduced to guarantee the security of the tenure and to fix the rent for lands. This policy freed cultivators from tedious settlements and excessive demands of the state. The Bengal Rent Act of 1859 served as a model for this enlightened approach to an age old but a vexatious problem.

Chivalry and Martial Background of the Meo Community

The Rebellion of 1857, which broke out from Meerut and a day after in Delhi, firstly, attracted the Meos of Mewat. They were

one of the communities in the suburb of Delhi who joined the Rebellion on the same day on its outbreak. They could not control their nerves from the active participation in the Rebellion, which provided them a chance, after many centuries, to prove their chivalry and patriotism. Their historical background goaded them to do or die for their motherland.

Historically, the Meos belonged to the martial race, which was always engaged in the warfare. It is being proved that their origin was from the belligerent Med community belonging to the Greek and Iranian Empire, well known at that time as Media. At the time of Alexander's invasion in India, most of the Meds of his army showed their courage to conquer the Indian territory of Sindh and consequently, continued to enter the Sindh territory following the Alexander's invasion. It is well known that, Alexander left an army under his Governor, Seleucus Nicator, to guard the Indian territory of Sindh, and he himself returned to Babylonia. Subsequently, the Meds, who were major part of Macedonian army also settled over the region occupied by the Greeks, and became well-known inhabitants, particularly in the coastal and hilly areas of Sindh.²⁴

The area to which the Meds inhabited in Sindh was not very fertile so the livelihood of the inhabitants was a little difficult. The martial history of this tribe forced them to engage themselves into the sea piracy. While doing that job, they came in contact with the Arabian traders of that time. They fought many battles with the Arab traders on the issue of piracy. Consequently, the Arabs under Mohammad bin Qasim conquered the Sind territory. Hard pressed by Arab conquest, the Meds were drove away to hither and thither and finally took their shelter into the hilly areas of Arawali ranges, covering modern states of Haryana and Rajasthan, which were safe for their livelihood. Subsequently, they embraced Islam and called themselves as Meos in order to distinguish themselves from their Hindu brethren now known as Meenas.²⁵

After their settlement in the suburbs of Arawali, they did not forget their main occupation of warfare and agriculture. The alkaline soil and barren land of Mewat made the Meos' life very tough, and consequently, it made them brave and warring in

comparison to other communities of India. Due to their courage and bravery, they engaged themselves in loot and plunder at the time of the famine and other natural disasters. That's why most of the British scholars explained the Meos of India as robber and plunderer.

The Meos after settling themselves in the area of Mewat, divided themselves into two groups. One group formed the ruling class and other group of the subjects, just like the Chaukidari and Zamindari of the Meenas. Most of the peoples of both the groups started accepting Islam throughout time. After accepting Islam, they changed their nomenclature. Ruling class became known as Khanzada, at the time of Bahadur Nahar Khan, and the subjects were known as the Meos.²⁶

The first known example of chivalry of the Meos after their settlement in the region of Mewat was their fight in 1256, 1260 and 1266 against Balban, the Prime Minister and later on the despotic ruler of the Delhi Sultanate. In 1256, the Meos fought bravely but could not resist long due to the heavy imperial forces. However, they were waiting a chance to revenge their defeat. In 1260 when Ulugh Khan was in the way to Rewari, the Meos carried off a large number of Balban's camels from his army. It was the signal of their open rebellion against Balban. About 12,000 Mewati ladies, gents, and children were put to death. After twenty days slaughter, Balban returned to the capital with 250 chieftains of the Meo tribe, who had stolen the camels and other 250 leading men of the tribe, 142 horses, and 2,100,000 silver *tankas*. Two days later the prisoners along with their leader Malkha were publicly massacred with great cruelty near Hauz Rani in front of the Badaun Gate. Some were thrown under the feet of elephants; others were cut in halves with knives.²⁷

Even after repression of Balban, the Meos continued their terror for the Delhi Government. According to the Ziauddin Barani in his *Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi*, the daring of the Mewatis in the neighborhood of Delhi was carried to such an extent that the westerly gates of the city were shut at afternoon prayer. Meos plundered the travelers on the roads, entered the city by night, and robbed the inhabitants in their houses, and even by day robbed

and stripped water-carriers and women drawing water from the large reservoirs *Sar-Hauz* just within the city walls, so that it became necessary to shut the gates on the western side of the city immediately after the hour of afternoon prayer. No one dared to go out of the city in that direction after that hour, whether he traveled as a pilgrim or with the display of a sovereign. These daring acts of the Mewatis caused a great ferment in Delhi. Barani further says that the Sultan felt the repression of the Mewatis and for a whole year, he was occupied in overthrowing them and in scouring the jungles.²⁸

When Balban ascended the throne of Delhi in 1266, he again attacked on Mewat. The Meos fought with full of their strength. One lakh of the royal army was slain by the Mewatis, and the most probability the same numbers of Mewati were also put to the sword.²⁹

At the time of Firoz Tughlaq, the Meos under Bahadur Nahar Khan became successful in forming their government in Mewat. It was the height of their chivalry and bravery that the Meos under Khanzada rulers became the king maker during the rule of the late Tughlaqs and early Sayyeds of the Delhi Sultanate. Although, they also faced the wrath of the Delhi imperial army time to time with the loss of their men and money. They fought many battles, against Delhi rulers, under Jalal Khan, Qadar Khan, Aqlim Khan, Ahmad Khan, Alawal Khan, etc. During the Babar's invasion on India, the resistance of Raja Hasan Khan Mewati in the battles of Panipat and Kanwaha is well known. In the battle of Kanwaha, the Meos lost their king and cherished leader Hasan Khan Mewati.

Alaxander Cunningham mentions about the Meos' resistance against the rulers of Delhi as follows:³⁰

"As Hindus the Meos often successfully resisted the arms of the Muhammadan kings of Delhi until the time of Feroz Tughlak, when they became converts to Muhammadanism. But in spite of their change of religion the Moslem Meos were just as turbulent as their Hindu ancestors — and they remained virtually independent from the time of Timur's invasion until the conquest of Northern India by Babar."

Emperor Akbar was cautious enough about the bravery of the Meos and utilized their energy in nation building. He employed the Meos in large scale. Abul Fazal in *Aine Akbari* writes the name Mewrah, and says that they were natives of Mewat. He praises the Meos by saying them as famous runners and one thousand of them were employed by Akbar as post-carriers, who were called *Dak-Mewrahs*. He quotes as "Mewatis are natives of Mewat, and are famous as runners. They bring from great distances with zeal anything that may be required. They are excellent spies, and will perform the most intricate duties. There are likewise one thousand of them, ready to carry out orders."³¹

At the time of Rebellion of 1857, the Meos, whose history witnesses the chivalry, bravery and patriotism for their land, worked a lot in their participation in the war against the British. They find the British oppressors equal to the Arab and Delhi rulers and reminded their glorious past while fighting against the British rule.

Meos' Unrest over Annexation of Firozpur Jhirka

The Meo community was naturally very loyal to their motherland Mewat and its rulers. A little bit humiliation was never tolerable to the Meos, on any conditions. In this connection, the humiliation, dethronement and execution of Nawab Shamsuddin Khan of Firozpur Jhirka and its annexation to the British territory was foremost. This infamous and humiliating episode added more fuel on the burning episode of heavy taxation policy of the British Government in Mewat.

The principality of Firozpur Jhirka was awarded to Ahmad Baksh Khan, on his role played in helping Lord Lake, during Second Anglo-Maratha War in 1803. Firozpur Jhirka principality, including the other parganas of Punhana, Bichhor and Sakras awarded by the British Government, was bringing in the revenue of almost Rs.80,000. It was in addition to the Loharu principality, granted by Raja Bakhtawar Singh of Alwar to Ahmad Baksh Khan, at the same time.³²

Although Ahmad Baksh Khan was not a Meo Nawab but his marriage with a Meoni of Ghata village, named Maddi, and

nomination of her son as his heir, acquired enough sympathy from the Meo community or his subject. Nawab Ahmad Baksh Khan had two sons from the Meoni wife Maddi Begum named Shamsuddin Khan, born in 1809 and Ibrahim Khan, born later on and died in his childhood. From another wife, Begum Jaan, there were also two sons named Ameenuddin Ahmad Khan, the Nawab of Loharu and Ziauddin Ahmad Khan.³³

Before his death, Nawab Ahmad Baksh Khan had divided his principality into his sons; Firozpur Jhirka to his firstborn son Nawab Shamsuddin Khan and Loharu to Nawab Ameenuddin Khan. The eldest son of the family Nawab Shamsuddin Khan (1827-1835) was succeeded after his father's death. However, his reign did not last long, and he was executed at Delhi for compassing the murder of Sir William Fraser,³⁴ the Resident to Delhi in 1835. Subsequently, the *Pargana* of Firozpur was taken away by the British, and the state of Loharu was given to his brothers Aminuddin and Ziauddin Khan.³⁵

The enmity between William Fraser and Nawab Shamsuddin Khan bears many stories. William Fraser's pleasure loving nature and political interference became the sole cause of his murder. Faulkner states that Shamsuddin wished to deprive his younger brother Ameenuddin of his proper share of the estate, which William Fraser opposed. Mohammad Ashraf in his book '*Meo Qaum aur Mewat*' also repeats the same story and says that Fraser was the friend of Ahmad Baksh Khan and wanted to implement his last wishes. Fraser not only supported Nawab Ameenuddin Khan but instigated him to appeal in the court of Governor General for justice. The court gave an order for the division of the principality according to the wishes of Nawab Ahmad Baksh Khan. Nawab Shamsuddin Khan then employed his servants to murder William Fraser.³⁶

Channing also gives more or less the same details that an order was passed by the British Government that Nawab Shamsuddin Khan should administer Loharu as well as Firozpur and Punhana, his brothers being provided for by pensions. Mr. W. Fraser, the Commissioner of Delhi, objected to this decision, and procured a delay in its being given effect. According to Nawab Sarwarul Mulk

Bahadur, a relative of the same family, Mr. Fraser had an eye on the sister of Nawab Shamsuddin Khan. General Hervey recorded that the provocation was that Mr. Fraser had enquired about the Nawab's sister by name.³⁷

According to the novel of Shamsur Rahman Faruqi entitled, "*Kai Chand The Sare Aasman*," quoted in the *Dawn* magazine, that the mother of Mirza Dagh Dehlavi or wife of Nawab Shamsuddin Khan, Wazir Khanam was the most beautiful lady of his time. However, living in Delhi as a widow, she with her charms attracted the attention of Mr. Fraser and Nawab Shamsuddin Khan at the same time. Nawab succeeded in winning her, which led to the hostility between the two men ending in the murder of William Fraser and the consequent hanging of Nawab Shamsuddin Khan and confiscation of his principality.³⁸

Another reason comes in limelight in recent researches that Mirza Ghalib, one of the scions of Nawab Shamsuddin Khan from the side of Begum Jaan, wanted to enhance the reduced pension. In this connection Mirza Ghalib started backbiting Mr. Fraser against Nawab Shamsuddin Khan. Mirza Ghalib also made spiteful remarks about the low origin of Nawab Shamsuddin Khan. It is said that in the influence of the opponents of Nawab Shamsuddin Khan, Fraser denied to even meet him at his residence in Delhi. These humiliations and ill-remarks enhanced the enmity between the two and subsequently murder of William Fraser.³⁹

Whatever was the exact reason of open hostility between the two, but it was sure that the reputation of the Nawab was damaged and the dignity of the household was shattered. The illegal intervention of Mr. Fraser in political affairs of Ferozpur Jhirka added more filth to their relations. The Meos as a whole were also indirectly felt humiliated over the attitude and undue intervention of William Fraser.

Nawab Shamsuddin Khan deputed Karim Khan, a famous Meo sharp shooter of Rangala village of Mewat, for the murder of William Fraser. Karim Khan was popularly known as "*Bhar Maru*" (sharp-shooter), due to his sharp shooting, courageous and murderous characteristics. Karim Khan easily agreed to end the

game of William Fraser, and accordingly went Delhi along with his servant Annia Meo, a famous runner, at the end of 1834. Karim Khan stayed in a building of Mughal Beg at Daryaganj and began to watch Mr. Fraser at his residence in Bara Hindu Rao. In between, Nawab Shamsuddin Khan made correspondence with Karim Khan in code words, which proved that Nawab wanted to purchase a dog through Karim Khan.⁴⁰

Karim Khan Meo, after a long wait of many months, finally got the opportunity on 22nd March 1835, and at 11 pm of the same night, he shot dead Mr. Fraser near his residence. His servant Annia Meo ran away from the spot and reached Firozpur Jhirka covering ninety miles in twenty four hours. Karim Khan also rode away by his famous black horse. Charles Metcalf's nephew Tom Metcalf, who later on succeeded as Resident of Delhi reached on the spot and enquired from his servants and became known that the murderer was on a black horse. Tom Metcalf quickly followed the killer but failed to trace him in dark night.⁴¹

On hearing the news, John Lawrence also reached Delhi from Panipat. After a detailed enquiry, they reached on the conclusion that Nawab Shamsuddin Khan was behind the murder of Mr. Fraser. They arrested Annia, the servant of Karim Khan Meo, made him the government witness on the condition of sparing his life. On the witness of Annia, both the Nawab and Karim Khan arrested and executed on Thursday morning, 3rd October, 1835, close outside the north of Kashmiri Gate, leading to the cantonments.⁴²

Nawab prepared himself for the execution in a rich and beautiful dress of light green, the sacred colour of Muslims. After his death, his principality was confiscated and attached to district Gurgaon. It is said that after the execution of Nawab, his face automatically changed to west side. Notwithstanding, the implication of Section 144 by the British Government, about 8000 people participated in the burial ceremony of both Nawab Shamsuddin Khan and Karim Khan Meo. Maulana Shah Mohammad Ishaq, the maternal grandson of Maulana Shah Abdul Aziz Dehlavi offered the burial prayer.⁴³

By the execution of both the Mewatis, and confiscation of the Firozpur Jhirka State, there spread the resentment and non-

cooperation to the government in Mewat. Many leaders even revolted against the British Government. Maulana Abdullah Khan Mewati of Firozpur rose in an open revolt in which hundreds of Mewatis arrested and killed, including Maulana Abdullah Khan Mewati. Although, the British Government brutally crushed the Mewatis before their rising, but they could not be controlled at the time of the Rebellion of 1857. Many scholars believe that the execution of Nawab Shamsuddin Khan was one of the reasons of Mewati Rebellion of 1857.⁴⁴

Despite the jagir was confiscated in 1835, but the family continued to play an important part in the public affairs throughout the period of British rule and even after. Several members from the family have been among the finest poets and literary figures of the Urdu language. Among them, Dagh Dehlvi, the son of Nawab Shamsuddin Khan, and Mirza Ghalib and Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, both connected by marriage to the family.⁴⁵

Interference in the Village Communities

After assuming the central authority in Indian subcontinent, the British Government directed their attention towards the peasants and their agrarian conditions. The time-honoured institutions like the village communities and panchayats were abolished by the British. In fact, these institutions were the centers of all the social and economic life of the villagers. The village communities and the panchayats were built up according to the requirements of the people and under these institutions they felt themselves secure and happier. Their destruction brought social instability, and people felt insecure and unhappy. Adding more distress to the village communities, the British Government had broken the backbone of the farmers by imposing heavy revenues and cesses.

There was a strong reaction in the local society against the British intervention in their age-old customs and traditions. As for the Mewat region, the whole area was rural and the cities like Gurgaon, Rewari, Kanaud, etc. were just like villages. All the villages were self-sufficient and were regulated by the village constitution forming a community. The decision of the panchayats, the ruling body of the village community, was obeyed unanimously

with religious bounds. Though living in different realms of their respective religions and castes, they generally adhered the common village deities, Pirs, Sadhu saints and common customs and traditions, forming a composite culture. This common identity and composite culture goaded the villagers to take a united stand whenever the need arose.⁴⁶

The past rulers like Afghans, Mughals, Marathas and Sikhs, who ruled over this region always realized the practical utility of this arrangement, and except the collection of revenue, never tried to disturb it. The British also did not find it easy to administer the area without the existing system. Nevertheless, in order to improve the lot of the rural masses, the British implemented their own system of governance. The process of their so-called improvements somewhat directly or indirectly disturbed the social set-up of the Mewatis.

K.C. Yadav writes that the British public officials, both revenue and the police interfered in the internal affairs of the villages. Their courts took up the work of dispensing justice, throwing the panchayats into oblivion. Yadav gives the example of Metcalfe that he punished offenders without weighing their guilt or fault. Metcalfe gave to one Roshan Khan, a policeman, life imprisonment accompanied by hard labour for having been accused of stealing 7 lbs. of thread. Yadav further says that even death penalties were awarded without printed regulations.⁴⁷

The people did not find the British system to their taste and always regarded the British as no better than usurper and plunderer. The British system administration greatly affected the martial races of that tract such as Meos, Goojars, Ahirs, Jats and Ranghars, who lost no chance in resisting the British whenever and wherever they could find. The British system of administration and its interference with the long existing village communities greatly provoked the villagers of Mewat to rise against the British during the Rebellion of 1857.

These village communities were having no obligation to the Government or any other authority except for the payment of taxes. These communities independently managed most of their

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local affairs. D.C. Verma & Sukhbir Singh has quoted Metcalfe, which has shared his experiences that, "The village communities are little republics, having nearly everything they want within themselves and almost independent of any foreign relations. They seem to last where nothing else lasts. Dynasty after dynasty tumbles down; revolution succeeded to revolution; Hindu, Pathan, Mughal Mahratta, Sikh, English are masters in turn, but the village communities remain the same."⁴⁸

The observation of another British officer Gubbins needs to be quoted here, although it was observed for the Awadh peasantry, but it has been explained exactly as of the Metcalfe for peasantry of Haryana and Mewat. The quote is as follows:⁴⁹

".... Of these the most marked and universal feature was that of the village communities. The brotherhood which resided in each village was the only real proprietor of the soil, and among its members, the ancestral fields are divided. Each village was a separate little republic and having its accountant, public servants, the priest, the carpenter, the smith, the washer man, and the watchman, who were generally paid by dues claimable from the grain produce of each shareholder. The payment of a land tax was one of the oldest institutions of the country. It was levied from the several shareholders, by a rate upon the land, the shares, the ploughs, or the grain produce, and was paid to the Government officer through the head man of the village. As the numbers of these communities increased, their land no longer afforded them a sufficient maintenance, and numbers leave their villages to seek service, returning on the leave of absence to visit their families; and retiring when pensioned to live and die in their ancestral home. Such were the features which distinguish the class from which the Sepoys were drawn. They were originally proprietors of the soil, and they valued this right of property in the land above all earthly treasure."

Some scholars believe that the socio-economic measures adopted by the British administration were for the betterment of the peasantry, but Mewat was not reconciled to that system. D.C.

Verma & Sukhbir Singh quotes Percival Spear in which he attributes the failure to two causes. Firstly, the over assessment of land which was bitterly resented as it brought into operation oppressive methods. Secondly, the tampering with the age-old institutions such as the panchayats.⁵⁰

Most of the areas of Mewat region were inhabited by the peasantry or agro based people. They were living the simple rural life established by their ancient forefathers. As many scholars described, their village community system was a small republic governed by the panchayats. The British interference into their system deeply hurt their feelings and they were alarmed of the destruction of their age-old social setup. All these changes dealt a serious blow to the rural society, particularly the cultivators and tribes of Mewat region. For the peasant, the new changes in agrarian economy and social structure meant more intensive and systematic exploitation. During the Rebellion of 1857, these Mewatis rose vehemently against the British in order to save their social set-up, honour and dignity to which they cherished from many centuries.

After disturbing the entire social setup, the British Government introduced a unique type judiciary which was unknown to the Indian masses. The newly judicial setup was much disgusting, repressive, arbitrary and expensive. There was no proper check on the judges, and a provision for appeal was not made in the legal system. It was neither liked by the people of the country nor appreciated by the efficient and reasonable administrators. It is said that bribery and corruption among the judges were prevalent.

Religious Factor

After the annexation of the Indian territories, the British Government, apart from most of its barbaric policies, adopted the unholy secret design of promoting the conversion to Christianity. The Government-missionary nexus gave further credence to the rumour about the use of cow and pig fat for the cartridges of Enfield Rifles. These blasphemous episodes of the British policies increased the people's growing disaffection with the Government. The Ulema or the Muslim theologians quickly responded over the

issue and mobilized the people, particularly Muslim masses to rise against the Government during the Rebellion of 1857.

The Ulema, right from the British occupation of Delhi, were bitterly against the British rule in India. The first example of such resentment was the fatwa of Shah Abdul Aziz (1746-1824) the illustrious son of Shah Waliullah Dehlawi (1703-62). He issued the famous fatwa in 1803 declaring that India had ceased to be a *Dar-ul-Harb* or "Country of the Enemy". This fatwa from politico-religion point of view was a landmark in the history of India in general and for the Muslims of India in particular. It amounted to a call to religious conscientious Muslims to mobilize them in the absence of a powerful Muslim ruler, under whose popular leadership they would rise in defence of foreign power.⁵¹

Following the call of their cherished leader, every section of the Muslim community responded positively. During the Rebellion, the Muslim Ulema showed their resentment following the plea of the religion. They adopted the Wahabi ideology and fought against the British; although, they were arrayed initially against the tyrannical rule of Ranjit Singh of Punjab. They thought that the introduction of English medium of instruction in the schools, changing of Court language, propagation of Christianity, were the instruments of converting the Indian masses into Christianity as well as the direct attacks on their religion. In the schools run by the Christian Missionary or the British Government, the boys heard much about the Christian religion, of which the parents disapproved, but they were unable to withdraw their boys in the desire of Government jobs. Any measure of development started by the British was considered as a prelude to the conversion into Christianity.

These Muslim Ulema with a purported or avowed religious agenda were commonly termed *Ghazis* or *Jihadis* and *Mujahideen* in British sources. This terminology implied that they were holy warriors, fighting for Islam and their country. The modern historians prove this fact of religious perspective of the Rebellion of 1857 based on very authentic contemporary documents. This religious perspective was fully coloured undoubtedly with Wahabi ideology. Like many of the researchers about the

dominancy of the religious factor, a modern historian Dalrymple's research also emphasizes the religious factor based on Urdu documents in the National Archives. The words *Deen* and *Dharma* (the Muslim and Hindu words for religion) appear constantly in revolutionary proclamations, and were used as war the cry by the combatants. These facts show the extent to which religious feelings goaded the revolutionaries; it goes well beyond the question of greased cartridges.

Although, the Muslim intellectuals such as Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, Mirza Ghalib, Maulvi Zakaullah, etc. who had seen the horrific scenes of the insurrection, thoroughly denounced the call of *Jihad* by the Ulema. According to them, the Muslim religious fervour against the British during the Rebellion of 1857 was surely supported by the followers of other communities of India. Undoubtedly, the intellectuals' plea was based on saving the Muslims from the heavy hands of the British. Certainly, at most of the places the people belonging to both the religions were fought shoulder to shoulder against the British. The Ayodhya episode in such a reference was the fine example. Maulana Amir Ali, a well-known Maulvi and the chief priest of Hanuman Garhi, Baba Ramcharan Dass of Ayodhya took up arms and fought gallantly against the British. They both hanged together in Ayodhya.⁵²

The other revolutionaries, without any doubt, at most of the places not only supported the *Mujahideen* whole heartedly but jointly carried the struggle for a long time. The contemporary British chronicler Thomas Lowe also testifies the same opinion by writing about this thesis in 1860. Thomas Lowe writes, "The infanticide Rajput, the bigoted Brahmin, the fanatic Musalmans, and the luxury-loving fat-paunched ambitious Mahrattah, for they all joined together in the cause; cow killer, cow worshiper, the pig hater and pig eater the crier of 'Allah is God and Mahomet his Prophet,' and the mumblor of the mysteries of Bram!"⁵³ Thomas Lowe concluded that they all joined together against the British during the Rebellion of 1857.

However, it surely could not be denied that the Wahabi and Faraizi fighters and other likeminded freelance *Mujahideen's* involvement were in greater extent. The sacrifices of lives and

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property of the Ulema clearly shows their intention of love for their religion and nation. The Ulema were not at all the Sepoys, but a freelance fighter and they maintained their identity as a separate class. These Ulema not only participated themselves in the Rebellion but aroused the sentiments of the other Muslims to fight against the British. The people rushed to fight against the British on the call of the Ulema. Regarding such an influx, some of the intellectuals believe that the preaching of such Ulema did indeed have an effect on those soldiers, who later joined the *Mujahideen* at the outbreak of the Rebellion. Some of them also argue that the *Mujahideen*, who took part in what they conceived as a *Jihad*, did so in the belief that the Rebellion of 1857 was an extension of the egalitarian and reformist Shah Waliullahi Movement.

However, the factor of religion was having little importance, especially for the people of Mewat but it could not be completely ignored. The greased cartridge episode was the burning example of the religious interference by the British. It hearted both Hindus and Muslims as the cartridges were greased with the cow and swine fats. However, the peasantry in Mewat had no direct concern with this matter, but it also could not be ignored that many peasant family members were in the military service of the government and were deeply hearted due to this act. It not only infuriated the related families but all the villagers as use of the greased cartridges had polluted the religion of the brotherhood or the village communities.

Undoubtedly, the people of Mewat were not educated but due to the religious policies of the British Government, some of the Maulvis played instrumental in arousing their religious feelings against the Christianity or the British. Right from the occupation of Mewat territory, the British custom and traditions indirectly affected the people, and they felt that the British Government was bent on interfering their religion and age-old established customs. Doing away the Arabic, Persian and Sanskrit and imposing English on its place confirmed the local intelligentsia that they would be deprived of knowledge of the principles of their own faith.⁵⁴

Right from the beginning of the British occupation of Mewat, the Ulema class of that region was bitterly against the British. The religious interference and uncordial behavior of the British Government further added fuel in the existing hostility. Just after the annexation of the Mewat region, Maulvi Evaz of Notki village along with other Maulvis and Meo people attacked upon the British army in 1806 and harmed them severely. Fearing the defection of the Mewati people, the British Commissioner, Mr. Seton advised his officers for cordial behave with the people of Mewat.⁵⁵

Most probably the religious interference was the chief cause of the Wahabi revolution much before the Rebellion of 1857, which affected a lot in the Mewat region. The Maulvi class of the Mewati society was in constant touch with the other Maulvi *Mujahideen* of Frontier who were constantly fighting against the British. They were not only in touch with the *Mujahideen* but also fought shoulder to shoulder against the British. Revolutionary emissaries from the Frontier found the Mewat region a fertile field for their activity. As mentioned in *Tarikh-e-Meo Kshatriya*, a Mewati named Haji Abdullah Khan of the village Kankarkhera of Tijara Tehsil in Mewat went to the Frontier along with his followers to fight in the battle of Balakot. After their defeat, he returned to his country and began to organize his people for the new mission, or war against the British. Haji Abdullah Khan was closely supported by another Mewati named Miyanji Karimullah Gohanvi.⁵⁶

After the battle of Balakot, Maulana Mahboob Ali Dehlavi and Maulana Sayyed Hyder Ali Tonki, the close associates of Maulana Sayyed Ahmad of Rai Bareli, toured the whole area of Mewat and mobilized the Mewatis to fight against the British to save their religion and nation. They became successful in creating the great followers in Mewat, who were ready to sacrifice their lives and property for the sake of their religion and nation.⁵⁷

When the Rebellion started in Delhi, the revolutionaries from frontier areas rushed towards Delhi to fight for the nation. Most of them were having close connection from the region of Mewat. They motivated the youths of Mewat to fight against the British

by the name of religion and nation. They became successful in recruiting the freelance Mewati *Mujahideen*, which later joined the other revolutionaries of Delhi. This fact is being proved by the letters written to the Commander-in-Chief General Bakht Khan by the Mewati *Mujahideen* (*Fidawiane Jameeye Mewat*) and their leader Alif Khan. The letter written on 13th August 1857 is as follows:⁵⁸

"Aali Jaah! As we, the hundreds of *Mujahideen* from the district Mewat, promptly rushed to sacrifice our lives on your request after leaving our children and other family members on the mercy of God. We have been doing so for several months. Other revolutionary fighters are getting the proper salary and we the *Mujahideen* are without diet, living on the blood of our heart, and being martyred in the same condition of thirst and hunger. Our sacrifices are well-known among the other revolutionaries. We had sold one of our horses and got one female horse and 45 rupees for our daily subsistence. Nevertheless, we are sorry to say that you have taken over the rupees and female horse and also made serious allegations of mismanaging the Government property. Our team leader Alif Khan had many times submitted his request before you but you have not heeded his appeal. We have no concern for mixing the lead. The lead defaulters had run away and somehow we the innocents were arrested in the way, and you have still not enquired about the matter. This is improper according to the constitution and justice. On doomsday, we have to show our face before God, who has given us the present life. That's why we are here to seek justice otherwise we the hundreds of *Mujahideen* would have gone to our homes after informing you formally. If you would not give us justice, we surely would be given on the Day of Judgement. Now we are requesting to your honour. Whatever we deemed fit we said."

After the suppression of the Rebellion at Delhi, the same *Mujahideen* came to Mewat and fought against the British at different fronts. Among these *Mujahideen*, Maulvi Noor Ali, Maulvi Mohammad Mureed, Maulvi Abul Hasan Afghani, Huzoor of

Kheti, Dr. Nazar Mohammad of Badshahpur, etc. were in the fore. At the time, when the British completely suppressed the Rebellion in Mewat, some of these *Mujahideen* permanently settled in this region and began the tabligh work in Mewat.⁵⁹

Maulana Abdul Shakoor quotes the version of Dr. Nazar Mohammad Badshahpuri that in July 1857, four persons came to his house at Badshahpur. One of them known as Maulvi Mohammad Mureed was injured with a bullet. The bullet was poisoning his leg. Dr. Nazar provided him medical aid and arranged for their stay in a dome which was two furlongs away from his house.⁶⁰

As the four aforesaid revolutionaries were hiding in the dome for long time, they became known to the people of Badshahpur. It was the time when the Rebellion in Mewat was suppressed, and the British forces were combing and hanging the revolutionaries. Dr. Nazar advised them to change their destination. They all moved towards Mewat. Maulvi Mohammad Mureed settled at Firozpur Jhirka. One of them Maulvi Noor Ali had chosen his destination at Rewari. The third one lived at Kheti village in Alwar State and was more popular with the name of Huzoor. The fourth, Maulvi Abul Hasan settled himself at the village Bhoonri in Mewat.⁶¹

The religious unity of both Hindus and Muslims was a great threat to the British. The British were extremely worried and horrified with this kind of unity of the people of two religions. After suppression of the Rebellion, they tried to break the unity in a most horrendous and sickening manner. A story of Hansi is one of such examples of breaking the unity. At Hansi, Hukumchand Jain and Muneer Beg were leading the revolutionaries of the Rebellion. They led many successful military campaigns in the area but were defeated and captured. After hanging them on the same tree at Hansi on January 19, 1858, Hukumchand Jain was buried and Muneer Beg was cremated against the custom of their respective religions. It was done with the obvious purpose of making fun of the unity of these two revolutionaries belonging to different religions and show hatred towards their comradeship.⁶²

Interference in the Cottage Industries

After the annexation of India, the British started its most unpopular policy, the de-industrialisation of India. Due to the Industrial Revolution in England, there was a heavy demand of the raw materials from India and market for their finished products. The de-industrialisation policy of the British Government closely affected the petty industries of Mewat region. The import of Europeans clothes and objects to India rendered traditional artisan communities like weavers, carpenters, iron smiths, shoe smiths and so on, jobless and without any alternative sources of income except begging. Thus, most of them actively joined in the Rebellion against the British as a protest against this social and economic injustice. During the Rebellion, they find a fair opportunity to avenge the oppressor by murder, loot and plunder.

Artisans and handicraft's men were largely affected by the British Government policy of promoting the British manufactured goods and neglect of indigenous industry in Mewat region. There were a large number of cottage industries in the Mewat region, including the tahsil of Rewari. *Imperial Gazetteer of India* reports that the Rewari town was ranking as one of the chief trading emporiums in the Punjab. Its merchants transact a large part of the commerce between the States of Rajputana and the Northern Provinces of British India. Salt from the Sambhar Lake, together with iron, forms the principal import; while sugar, grain, and English piece-goods compose the staple items of the return trade. Hardware of mixed metal is the chief manufacturing industry.⁶³

The Mewat region was the centre of important manufacture of hardware and famous handicrafts. Nuh, Firozpur Jhirka, Palwal, Hodal, and Hasanpur were the chief minor marts for country produce. Fine class shoes were made at Sohna. Beautiful glass bangles were manufactured at Sohna, Basai Meo in Firozpur and Rangala in Nuh; iron vessels were made at Darapur and Tankri in Rewari, and there were the usual manufactures of coarse cotton cloth and rough blankets. These industries were shattered due to the import of the British goods. Manufacture of salt another important industry in Mewat, that too suffered by unjust policies

of the British Government. The salts were prepared by the evaporation of brine raised from wells; this is carried on in the clusters of villages near Nuh.⁶⁴

In Firozpur Jhirka, there was the cotton industry in which many types of clothes were prepared for the people. Even the cotton was sent in large quantities from Alwar State for petty manufacturing of cloths in Firozpur Jhirka and other surrounding areas. Powlett mentions that the manufacture of iron was in former times a great industry in the Alwar State, as is testified by the large hillocks of slag, which are to be found in all directions; but it has fallen off largely of the late years, the value of the native iron having been extremely lessened by the large quantities imported from Europe.⁶⁵

Unrest of Meo Sepoys Serving under British and Native States

In 1857, the British East India Company controlled a vast area protected by a huge military force, composed of three distinct armies centered around the presidencies of Madras, Bombay, and Bengal. By 1857 the Bengal army was considered as the showpiece of the Indian army due to its hugeness and the most active role in the conquest of north India. The British Government recruited native volunteers in large numbers because of the vast British territory in north India, large resources of manpower that various Indian populations offered, and as the native soldiers were less expensive, better disciplined, and healthier than their European counterparts.

Following the people of different areas, the Mewati youths were employed in the Bengal army, Contingents of the principalities paid by the native governments as well as the local army of the native governments. They proved themselves a better fighter for their employer. The introduction of the new Enfield Rifles and rumor of the cartridges greased in swine and cow fats, surely would have affected the Mewati Sepoys like the other Sepoys serving under the British Government. It is said that the rural panchayats issued the decree that the Sepoys using the greased cartridges would be treated as outcastes and expelled from all communion. Instances of such a decree were firstly noticed at

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Ambala. It was more probable that the Mewati panchayats would have also issued such decrees.

The Meos, historically as the martial community, were largely employed by the British Government directly under Bengal army, their contingents of the princely states such as Gwalior and Kota Contingent, as well as the native governments of Alwar, Bharatpur, Gwalior, Dhaulpur, Rewari, Ballabhgarh, Jhajjar, etc. Even the Meos under the princely states were employed by the British Government for different contingents.

The Alwar State, which was including hundreds of Meo villages, naturally forming a major part of its army from the Meos and other martial communities. Out of 6795 Artillery, Cavalry and Infantry forces of the Alwar State, 1860 Muslims were from Alwar State and 292 were foreign Muslims (Pathans-630, Shaikhs-630, Sayyeds-320, Mughals-140, Khanzadas-360, Meos-12, others-40); 2342 from Alwar Rajputs and 546 from foreign Rajputs; 1580 from other Alwar Hindus, 172 from other foreign Hindus and three Eurasians.⁶⁶

As for the military service under British from the Alwar State, it was also proportionately enough. Powlett gives the description of the Meos and other people serving under British military service from Alwar State. According to Powlett, the British Cavalry and Infantry were consisted Brahmins, 9+35=44; Hindu Thakurs, 9+26=35; Jats, 2+31=33; Goojars, 0+40=40; Ahirs, 12+34=46; Shaikhs, 8+2=10; Sayyeds, 30+3=33; Pathans, 5+3=8; Khanzadas, 28+17=45; Qazis, 8+2=10; Meos, 11+34=45; Muslim Thakurs, 110+4=114; Saqqas, 6+14=20; thirteen other castes, 15+15=30.⁶⁷

In the State of Dhaulpur Mewati inhabitants were in abundance. In the military forces of Dhaulpur Rana, there was a Mewati contingent consisting of 100 to 1200 Cavalry.⁶⁸ Surely they would have played a very remarkable role during the Rebellion of 1857.

Apart from the military services in the princely states, the Meos were directly recruited in different regiments of the British Government. The exact numerical strength of the Mewati Sepoys is not known from the records, but some of the Mewati Sepoys, who were hanged after a short trial by William Ford, the Gurgaon

Deputy Commissioner, is shown in the Appendix-V. The Mewatis were largely recruited in the British army in the 10th Regiment of Irregular Cavalry, Punjab Cavalry, 2nd Regiment of Gwalior Contingent, 4th Regiment of Gwalior Contingent, 2nd Troop, 5th Regiment of Gwalior Contingent, 3rd Regiment of Gwalior Contingent, 3rd Regiment of Punjab Cavalry, 2nd Regiment of Punjab Cavalry, 15th Punjab Regiment, 4th Irregular Cavalry, 15th Irregular Cavalry, 2nd Irregular Cavalry, Kota Contingent, Gwalior Contingent, 3rd Regiment of Gwalior Contingent, and Haryana Light Infantry.⁶⁹

The Sepoys had their own reasons for resentment. The Sepoys were unhappy for low pay and racial discrimination in matters of promotion, pension and terms of service. However, the immediate cause of their mutiny was to the introduction of the Enfield Rifles which were loaded with the cartridges greased by swine and cow fats. They were in the suspicion that they would be forced to renounce their cultural ethos of centuries' old society was also an important cause of their insurrection. As far as Mewat region is concerned, most of the soldiers who were basically hailing from the peasant families were also unhappy with the new land revenue settlements introduced by the British Government.

Regarding the participation of the Mewati Sepoys in the Rebellion of 1857, they fought many battles in Mewat against the British. These battles which were fought in Mewat region were the battles of Raiseena (Alipur), Ghasera, Mahu, Rupraka, etc. In these battles, the Meo peasants and farmers were equally assisted by the Mewati Sepoys with their arms and ammunitions. After their defeat at Ghasera, the Meos completely evacuated the village and when the British force made house to house search they find the Sepoys' uniform and other belongings in most of the houses. For the British force each village, where they fought, was a regiment in itself. The Meo Sepoys not only fought in Mewat but showed their bravery at the battle of Nasibpur (Narnaul) and other various fronts. The Meo chaudharies also sent an army of Sepoys and civilian to fight in Delhi, on the call of General Bakht Khan and Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar. It is needless to say that mere civilian could never be so courageous to fight against the most advanced and well equipped British army.

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befriended as the Urdu Poet Mirza Ghalib and loved to discuss ancient Sanskrit texts. He was a brilliant scholar, metaphysician, and philosopher. He followed Indian customs, wore Indian clothing and a Rajput style beard, refused to eat pork and beef, and was virtually a half Hindustani. He frequently chatted and joked with his servants in their own language. Fraser had a harem and many wives; the senior most was a Jat lady. In Mewat he built a fort and called it the "Fraser Garh", in which he maintained one thousand Sepoys of his own raising and disciplining. There he lived like a Nawab, being as absolute in his domain as Bonapart of France. See for details, *Against History Against State: Counterperspectives from the Margins*, pp. 190-191.

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